

THE RECORD

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“APG to Grow under BRAC: Change on way to APG”

By Matt Ward: The Daily Record
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The U.S. military's Base Realignment and Closure process, commonly known as BRAC, will spawn “an explosion of intellectual energy” at Aberdeen Proving Ground, a retired four-star Army General said Monday.

What the massive military base reorganization process won't mean is more military personnel coming to Harford County.

Instead, 3,411 military personnel will be leaving the post, following the three major operations centers set to leave APG for bases in Virginia, Texas, and New Jersey.

Among Maryland officials, however, reaction to U.S. Department of Defense announcements Friday on the base realignment process has been wholly positive with APG expected to gain 5,371 civilian jobs.

When all is said and done, among the comings and goings of various agencies at Aberdeen Proving Ground, the post will gain 2,176 positions, most of them civilian.

U.S. Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger said Tuesday about 85 percent of the Department of Defense BRAC recommendations are ultimately approved.

“The very positive part about this for Aberdeen is we're gaining a lot of high-paying jobs,” Ruppersberger said. “Jobs is the gasoline that runs the government engine.”

The congressman said the City of Aberdeen and Harford County will have to work on roads, highways and schools in light of the predicted influx of high-tech workers.

“There are going to be some infrastructure challenges,” Ruppersberger said.

The 72,500-acre post is set to lose Army privates studying how to maintain trucks and gain jobs in the high tech fields of military chemistry, biology and engineering, retired Four-Star Gen. Barry McCaffrey said Monday afternoon during a tour at Battelle Eastern Science and Technology Center Monday afternoon.

McCaffrey called the Base Realignment and Closure decision from the Department of Defense “unbelievably sensible.”

On APG, the Ordnance Center and School, which trains military and civilian personnel for logistics and materiel management, will leave for Fort Lee, VA.; the Army Environmental Center, which helps guide the military's adherence to environmental law, will go to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas; and pre-deployment and mobilization operations, which of late have been relatively small in scope at APG will move to Fort Dix, N.J.

Meanwhile, the following operations, all in the areas of research and testing, will relocate to APG: The Vehicle and Technology Directorates of the Army Research Laboratories from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia; a missiles research lab from White Sands, N.M.; a command center for sensors, electronics, electronic warfare and tactical intelligence from Fort Monmouth, N.J.; administrative offices on chemical and biological research as well as the Army Test and Evaluation Command from leased spaces in Northern Virginia; the Civilian Personnel Office Center from Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois; a medical defense research center from Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington D.C.; and Navy and Air Force biological and chemical research labs from various locations.

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APG Benefits: APG’s net result from the proposed moves, reached by subtracting the 3,411 military personnel leaving from the 5,371 civilians coming, is an addition of 1,960 employees to the post and prospectively, to Harford County proper.

Another 216 people expected to come to APG as contractors would bring the total personnel additions to 2,176 people.

Those coming in “are generally going to be high paid technical people who are going to be looking for housing,” Dean R. Ertwine, retired commanding general of the U.S. Army Development Test Command at APG, said Monday.

Thomas Sadowski, director of economic development for Harford County, said Tuesday he thinks the county is ready to respond to growth at APG. Citing road improvement projects in the Perryman area and a plan to build a new train station in Edgewood, Sadowski said of the county sticks to its land use plan; it will be able to fulfill the military’s needs.

“These people, they’re definitely going to need a place to live,” Sadowski said.

Growth in work for government contractors and their need for housing, may be more difficult to predict, he added.

Schools in Aberdeen and Edgewood areas are generally crowded, with residential development in the county sections of Aberdeen closed until crowding at Aberdeen High can be eased. Edgewood middle and high schools are operating at near capacity.

‘Optimize military operations’: According to press releases from the Department of Defense, a push to optimize military operations was the driving force behind the realignment and closure decisions.

“BRAC is not a standalone event, but it’s a necessary step o improving the war fighting capability of the joint force,” Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Richard B. Myers said in a prepared statement.

The recommendations, which will be reviewed by the BRAC Commission and forwarded to President George W. Bush by Sept. 8, diminish the basic military operations at APG.

But Maj. Desiree Wineland, the Army’s spokeswoman for the BRAC process, said the biological and chemical research concentration is critical to the future of the American military.

“I don’t see [military operations at APG] diminishing at all,” Wineland said. “I see it as these [operations] are critical for where we’re going for future warfare.”

Maryland has feared well in the BRAC process, politicians say, with a total of 9,012 civilian jobs expected to be added, and for Detrick, Fort Meade, Andrews Air Force Base and APG all expected to gain jobs.

Sen. Paul Sarbanes issued comments on the outcome of the Pentagon’s deliberations, saying: “I am cautiously optimistic that once the process is completed later this year, Maryland will see an overall increase in defense – related and terrorism-fighting related jobs.”

Gov. Robert Ehrlich Jr. in a prepared statement, said leaders in the state have been preparing to retain Maryland’s military installations.

“We will have more information in the coming weeks, and we will continue to fight for facilities and communities affected by the BRAC process,” Ehrlich said the statement.

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Sounds financial decisions? McCaffrey, the retired four-star general, questioned oft-reported notion that the military will save money as a result of the BRAC process.

With a yearly budget of \$450 billion, the promise that BRAC will save in the range of \$300 billion over 10 years is less than significant; McCaffrey said, noting that the military basically broke even on the results of the last BRAC process in 1991. The state and county will have to pitch in on projects to revamp the infrastructure on and around the post, McCaffrey added.

The retired general, who appears frequently as a military analyst for cable news programs, said the recommendations will help to focus the military's missions, consolidating operations that “in 1941, made sense separate, but now only make sense together,”

Hypothetically, the worst case scenario for APG would be completely shutting down as a result of the BRAC process, McCaffrey said. The proposed moves on post represent the opposite end of the spectrum, making Aberdeen an important center of the military's mission, he said, adding the proposed plan “makes imminent military sense.”

President Bush will have until Sept. 23 to decide on the BRAC recommendations. If he approves them, Congress has 45 days to reject the recommendations. After that, the recommendations would become binding on the Department of Defense.

Ertwine, the retired head of the APG test command, said the changes on post aren't likely to diminish detonations and other noisy activities on post.